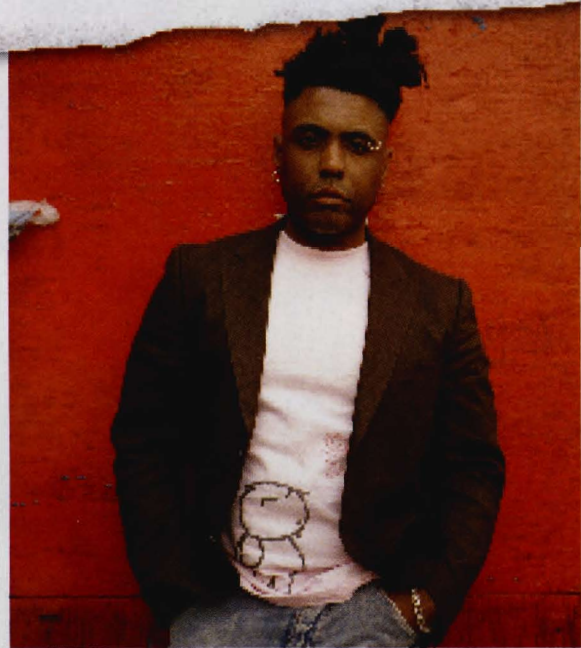


THE BRITISH ARE COMING



OMAR RETURNS WITH BRAND NEW CD

"Omar? Omar, is that you?" questions a blue jean-wearing, ball cap sporting Joe Schmo passing through the hotel lobby where, yes, the christened Godfather of British Soul, Omar, is staying.

"That is you!" Maybe Omar's signature hair and distinctive eyebrow ring gave him away. "I can't believe it. I have every one of your records," proclaims the fan as he hunts for a pen and a worthy object for Omar to sign. Omar politely entertains his admirer with a handshake and a signature. Then, as if acting out a cliché movie scene, the fan declares, "I won't wash my hand for a month," as he walks out of the hotel. Omar, appreciating good hygiene, quietly utters, "Please do."

Not only did the enthralled fan receive a signature and a lasting handshake, but he also learned that his idol had just released a new album, *Sing (If You Want It)*, which bowed in the U.S. in October. Considering it's been five years since Omar's last record, the fan took the news with great excitement and eagerness to expand his collection.

Although *Sing* was five years in the making, the 14 tracks of Omar-style, neo soul songs and numerous collaborations with renowned musicians, including icon Stevie Wonder, showcase Omar's undying devotion to making music.

In traditional Omar fashion, his sixth album is a mix of varying styles such as Latin, funk, soul, jazz, reggae, and classical. With its hip-hop touches and the aid of Omar's brother, Scratch Professor, *Sing* adds new depth to Omar's work. "This album's got more funky beats, more harder beats, stuff you can play in the clubs," Omar explains.

Certainly the funky hit "Your Mess" fits into that category, along with the multi-collaborative song featuring rapper Common, "Gimmie Sum," which wasn't originally a rap. "I decided to make it into a rap track because it sounded like it had an edge to it," says Omar, who previously worked on Common's *Electric Circus* album. Other guest appearances on *Sing* include Angie Stone, Rodney P, Estelle, and the legendary Stevie Wonder.

— Sarah A. McCarty



SOMETHING BRAND NEW UNDER THE SUN

Since 1990, Simon Bartholomew, Jan Kincaid, Andrew Levy, and vocalist N'Dea Davenport, known collectively as The Brand New Heavies, have been giving us a rare sound, known as acid funk, a combination of Acid Jazz and 70s R&B Funk. The UK-based band, playing funk grooves that many rappers sample from old '70s records, were a breath of fresh air to some and a bit of an enigma to others when they popped on the scene under the independent label, Delicious Vinyl. The stream of singles, "Dream on Dreamer," "Midnight at the Oasis," and "Back to Love," established The Brand New Heavies as one of the UK's finest, contemporary soul/dance groups and made them underground musical icons amongst a decidedly more conscious sect of music lovers stateside.

Soulful American vocalist, N'Dea Davenport, who contributed greatly to the Heavies' signature sound, took a break from the group in 1995 and in 1998 released her solo self-titled CD. But US fans weren't too excited about a Brand New Heavies minus N'Dea or vice versa. And, from the looks of things, neither were they. Singer and band reunite on the new CD, *Get Used to It*. "I walked into the restaurant in New York, sat down and picked up with N'Dea as though no time had passed," says Simon, lead guitarist. "We are family." A family bound by real music and real instrumentation, a group of folks who actually make music for the love of it. "When I'm not doing music, I'm still doing music," laughed Simon, stressing that the band plays even when the seats are empty and the recording light is off. With the music industry getting further away from real instruments, N'Dea and Simon say they are concerned for the new generation of music lovers and the lack of music programs in schools. "These kids are going to have a hard time understanding true musicianship," expresses N'Dea. "They are rarely getting proper instruction of music and different instruments. There is too much focus on commerce and not enough on artistry, and there is no variety." Though the Heavies have never been a huge commercial success in the United States, their multi-cultural fan base holds strong and now that the group's prodigal daughter has come home, who knows what success awaits them? — Cas Sigers